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FURTHER INFLUENCES UPON IBSEN'S *PEER GYNT*IV. Schack's *Phantasterne*

Schack's remarkable pathological study of the romantic imagination (1857) was brought into connection with Ibsen's poem directly after the latter's appearance by Brandes,¹ who characterized the relation so accurately that it would seem superfluous to expand the brevity of his verdict. What his thorough knowledge of Danish literature and his clear insight into literary origins immediately revealed has since been accessible to Ibsen-interpreters and may be found, for example, in Woerner's book.² In these works it is however, the general fact rather than the specific details that have been given and it remains very much a question whether the full significance of the relation has been adequately impressed upon the Ibsen reader or even the Ibsen scholar.

J. Paulsen³ bears witness to Ibsen's admiration for Schack's novel and his familiarity with it even to the ability to relate episodes from it, while Ibsen himself referred to it in a book-review published in a newspaper in 1860.⁴ What has impressed Brandes and others particularly is that Peer Gynt's fundamental characteristic of withdrawing from the world of reality to a world of fancy and so appearing a dreamer and coward rather than a man of strength of character is exactly what is treated by Schack as a morbid tendency, which once acquired, if not combated with the greatest energy and persistence, leads inevitably to insanity.

In noting further details which the work may have suggested to Ibsen I shall cite from the pages of the third edition of *Phantasterne* published in Copenhagen in 1899.

3 f. The dreamers make of themselves heroes in their imaginary adventures as Peer does of himself in his.

5 ff. The narrator imagines himself (cf. also 205 f.) king of Denmark in the time of Napoleon, who is referred to as

¹ *Samlede Skrifter*, III, 270 (1867).

² *Henrik Ibsen*, I, 258 f. 1900; 2nd ed., 265 f. 1912; cf. also V. Vedel, article on Schack in Salmonsens *Konversationsleksikon*, 1904 and Chr. Collin, *Bj. Björnson*, II, 314, 1907.

³ *Mine erindringer*, I, 180, 1900; II, 133, 1901.

⁴ *Samlede værker*, X, 451.

"Kejser." Among the aspirations of his companion Christian (who has taken over the rôle) for a greater Denmark England is mentioned, though as evidently hopelessly unattainable, being an island with great sea-power; compare also (10 ff.) the narrator's entrance into Copenhagen as "Kejser" of the Baltic and the homage paid him. Peer in the first act imagines himself king and "Kejser"; as such he rides aloft over the sea to receive the homage of England.

17. The Greeks and the Turks; compare *Peer Gynt*, 4th act.

26 ff. Asia and Africa, the reading of *Aladdin*; compare Peer's travels in the fourth act and the influence of Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* upon *Peer Gynt*.

27. "Skal vi saa langt?" "Ja, endnu længer, maaskee!" *Peer Gynt*, close of third act: "Så langt!" "Og længer endda."

33. In the imaginary oriental wanderings Christian takes notes in his notebook. Peer in Egypt (4th act) takes notes. Troy ("Troja") is mentioned in both.

34. "Oldforskeren"; Peer Gynt in fifth act reminiscing: "Oldtidsgranskeren."

35. "Prophetens Grav"; compare Peer's masquerade as "Profet."

37. "Sproggransker"; compare Peer's notes upon Begriffenfeldt's language in fourth act. The division of the three fields of investigation in Africa: linguistics, natural sciences and archaeology among the three "Phantaster" had apparently suggested to Ibsen the combination of the three in Peer's scholarly program.

67. Goethe is quoted, with an ironical suggestion that it was the fashion to do so ("at jeg skal vise, at jeg ogsaa kan citere Goethe") as Ibsen has Peer cite him in an off-hand way as an "esteemed author."

73. Faust and Gretchen are expressly referred to and again in the same humorous vein, it being also from *Faust* that Peer quotes.

107. Refuge from unpleasant reality is taken in "Phantasi." Peer's mother had brought him up on this theory, and he subsequently makes use of it for himself and eases his mother's last hours by it.

108 (cf. 4). The "Phantast" develops by "Phantasier" as other persons by actions and events. This thesis is fairly well illustrated by Peer Gynt's whole career.

189. The narrator imagining himself in the devil's rôle had exulted in having "bortsnappet den fede Steg" (cf. 184) from God himself. Ibsen in the fifth act of *Peer Gynt* has the devil ("den Magre") use the same expression. About to leave Peer he explains: "jeg skal hente en *steg*, som jeg håber blir fed."

189 f. "Guds Register"; Peer in fifth act is obliged to seek his "Synderegister." With the help of the "Synderegister" Peer hopes to escape the fate threatened him at the hands of the button-moulder. The "Phantast" is repeating the stanza of a hymn in the hope of escaping death and the devil. The stanza refers to the reckoning up of his life's account.

193. The narrator had from childhood felt that he would sometime by an unexpected event be called to a great career. Peer Gynt in his youthful years assures his mother he is born to something great.

197. The narrator at the crisis of his ailment contemplates the approach of insanity, as his friend Christian, the leader and original suggestor of the romantic debauches, later actually lands in the insane asylum (297). The crowning of Peer Gynt at the close of the fourth act as "Kejser" in the Cairo insane asylum probably owes its first suggestion to Schack's work, as I have noted before.⁵

198. "Phantasi" as a lie ("Løgn"). At the very start of Ibsen's play mother Åse accuses Peer of lying, he being engaged in narrating an imaginary adventure.

206. The narrator realizes that he is becoming insane, declaring that he has to get out of his own skin ("gaae ud af mit eget Skind") in order to get into it again, that he has to lie doubly in order to get back to the truth (He has imagined himself as himself in order to escape from his trouble and get back at work). This undoubtedly stands in relation to and helps explain, so far as it is susceptible of explanation, the insane Begriffenfeldt's declaration with reference to absolute reason, that it is not dead, but that it has gone out of itself, out of its skin ("Han er gået fra sig selv. Af sit skind er han gået"), which involves a whole revolution and reversal of intellectual values, with Peer Gynt as "Kejser".

207. The narrator finds help neither with God nor in himself and decides to resort to the devil. Peer in fifth act finding himself without hope of heaven tries to qualify for hell.

⁵ *Journ. Engl. and Germ. Philol.*, XIII, 243, 1914.

211. The narrator, despairing of himself, God and the devil, decides to hang himself, but lacks the courage. Peer in fourth act advises the insane fellah to hang himself and is dismayed and incredulous when he actually proceeds to do so.

225 f. The night watchman remarks of his wife that she is so bad that the only possibility of improvement would be a complete recreation—body and soul. This impresses the narrator as pretty much his own need also. It is not essentially different from the program of the button-moulder with respect to Peer.

227. Work as the sole means of salvation, not plans, etc.; this corresponds in essence with Ibsen's idea of going straight through, not round about as Peer does.

228. "Lysets Engel"; Peer in fifth act, "Lysets bud."

229 ff. Repentance ("Anger") appears as a hindrance to work and salvation, and accordingly as in part an inspiration of the devil. This helps explain an episode of Ibsen's poem that has caused difficulty to the commentator, viz., that in the fifth act of the yarn-balls, the withered leaves, etc. These represent exactly the work, or attempted work, of penitence in Peer's mind and Peer comes to exactly the same conclusion as the "Phantast" of Schack—that it is best to run away, as one's own sins are heavy enough without bearing those of the devil ("Fandens synder") in addition. Already in the third act after the encounter with the green-clad woman and her son Peer moralizes in similar tone upon repentance and avoids it. Recognition of the parallelism will of course not blind one to the fact that the reaction of the "Phantast" is one of practical common sense, while that of Peer is one of cowardice. Ibsen is, however, making it clear that Peer can not be saved by penitence.

232. "Han led og stred og Seier vandt" applied to persons who have recently died is compared by the narrator with his own case. This is in substance the text of the funeral sermon in *Peer Gynt* over the peasant who had mutilated himself to escape military service; Peer also compares with his own case.

263. Mention of photography ("Daguerreotypien") as a new invention; Ibsen has the devil ("den Magre") in Act 5 make use of the new discovery of photography ("i Paris") as a means of instruction to Peer with reference to the development of character.

263. America appears in Schack's work in connection with an American invention for weaving negroes' hair into a good fabric. We learn in Ibsen's fourth act that Peer had been in America dealing in negro slaves.

285. Allusion is made to the fondness of Thomas, the sceptic among the "Phantaster," for "det Reelle." In Ibsen's work it is Master Cotton as representative of England who speaks for "det reelle."

295. The princess Blanca in her romantic days had cut out of a book of fairytales a merman ("Havmand") with a gold crown, put him in a pasteboard palace and sunk it in the little lake. Peer in the third act imagines a mermaid ("Havfrue") as the most essential ornament of his castle (He is building a hut in the woods).

298. Christian, the chief of the "Phantaster," upon becoming an inmate of the insane asylum associates mostly with a small inmate, described as a "sørgelig Skikkelse," who resembles a monkey. The fact that he is kept constantly climbing trees to play Zacchaeus for Christian helps in the latter suggestion. With him is to be compared Huhu ("mørk skikkelse") in the Cairo insane asylum of *Peer Gynt* and his championship of the orang-utang language.

The above comparison shows clearly enough that Ibsen was favorably affected by Schack's work and that its influence was such that he wrote essentially in its spirit. The difference is, as has already been observed (Brandes, *loc. cit.*), that what Schack treated as a disease Ibsen treated as a sin. There is then a more personal attitude of indignation in Ibsen's case, the fire of an intense enthusiasm, which is absolutely lacking in the other work. The relation is however much more vital than has been adequately appreciated. Ibsen in his life work passed through all the chief literary movements of the nineteenth century (including the close of the eighteenth). Of the transitions the most abrupt and at the same time the most important is that from the romantic in its various directions to modern realism, which Ibsen first approached in his poetic philosophic dramas. In this approach the two literary influences of greatest moment, so far as can be seen at present, were Schack and Heiberg. Schack's influence was in the negative direction; he helped Ibsen to see that romanticism belonged to the past, that

it had no longer a part in the world of productive reality. It is possible, and indeed probable, that it was not solely or even primarily Schack that led Ibsen to this conviction, but in Schack's work Ibsen at any rate found a means of approach to the destruction of romanticism within himself and in his poetic production that appealed strongly to him and proved a very real help in a difficult, not to say critical process. If Schack's influence was in so far destructive, Heiberg's was on the contrary constructive. In Heiberg Ibsen not only found, as we have shown before, the model for an incisive satire of the philistine aspects of contemporary life, but he also set about realizing the aesthetic theory illustrated and preached by Heiberg, that the philosophical poetic drama is the highest form of literature.⁶

A. LE ROY ANDREWS

Cornell University

⁶ Heiberg, *Prosaiske Skrifter*, I, 485 ff. (1835 and 1861).